

Choosing Social Enterprise for Equity and Resilience

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Abstract

Building equity into existing organizational structures that systemically work against equity has become the trend for non-profit, for-profit, and governmental organizations, with varying degrees of progress and success. Instead of adding an equity component into an existing system, is it possible to build a system that centers equity? This paper explores work that has been done in creating an organizational structure that has equity built into its structure from conception so that it systemically works for equity. What mechanisms need to be put in place within a system to make equity its natural setting so that when a structure veers from equity, the mechanisms draw it back into balance? Additionally, a crucial aspect of building an equitable organization is resilience. Once an equitable organization is created, how can it be supported for resilience and scalability?

The focus of this paper will be on social enterprise as a promising model for addressing equity and resilience. Social enterprise is a new model that gained legal designation in Minnesota on January 1, 2015. This paper aspires to understand how an equitable organization can be created from conception, then looks at existing organizations to see how it is done. This allows for an analysis of theory and its application through real world practice. This paper also analyzes the promise of social enterprise as a resilient model, looking not only at its promise, but also its challenges and unintended consequences. We will look at the interplay of equity and social enterprise, considering why organizations choose this business model -- whether as a response to equity or as a model for resilience, or both.

Introduction

This paper is about equity and how it gets placed within an organization. I chose this topic because of what I had experienced in my lifetime involvement in organizations in which equity had not been a priority. How an organization comes into being doesn't happen in a vacuum. What shows up in the wider world shows up in the microcosmic world of an organization. If equity isn't a priority within our organizations, we can look at what's happening within the environment in which they exist for reasons why it isn't showing up. For this reason, I have provided a section on historical context in which organizations have been created.

This paper is also about social enterprise as a promising model for providing resilience to organizations that work for social benefit. This business model is relatively new as the Minnesota legislature enacted the Minnesota Public Benefit Corporation Act on January 1, 2015. Under this law, a public benefit corporation is a for-profit business at its core, but it is also formed to benefit the public in some way. This paper will use the terms "social enterprise" and "public benefit corporation" interchangeably. Currently, the research I've come across has been optimistic about social enterprise as a business model for profit and social benefit. As part of my topic, I look at the interplay of equity and the social enterprise model, considering whether organizations choose this business model as a response to equity as well as for resilience.

My approach to writing this paper has been to research peer-reviewed and non-academic published materials and reliable online sources. I was mindful that research materials may offer knowledge only up to a certain point in time, and it would be valuable to use another approach to find out how things have progressed. For me, learning and understanding only from research can also be too abstract. While I found useful information and lessons learned through research, I wanted to see the interplay of equity and social enterprise in real-world practice. As a result, this paper includes case studies of three Twin Cities social enterprises -- Eat for Equity, Element Gym, and Appetite for Change.

Historical context in which U.S. organizations are created

Historically, our nation was built on the foundation of white supremacy, as evident by the subjugation of indigenous people (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014), the enslavement of African people (Kolchin, 2003), the Jim Crow laws that continued to subjugate black folks after the abolishment of slavery (Tischauser, 2012), and anti-Asian immigration policies of the first half of the 20th century (Lee, 2015). We have an abundance of policies and legislation in areas such as employment, housing, voting rights, and immigration that are meant to keep out or keep down all types of folks. Manifest destiny, meritocracy, individualism, gender and racial superiority, are examples of deeply ingrained narratives within our national psyche created to support white supremacy. In effect, the behavioral and cultural norms embedded in our nation are based on the Anglo-European cultural framework. Our organizations are created within this historical context and in alignment with dominant culture and our existing system of white supremacy.

The Civil Rights movement created an opening for our nation to face up to our history and work towards alleviating inequities. During this era, social change was buttressed by the passage of landmark legislation (Brunner, 2007), such as the Equal Opportunity Act of 1964 (known as the War on Poverty) and the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 (also known as the Fair Housing Act), which outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. This was legal recognition that folks were situated differently due to systemic and structural barriers beyond personal control. The determinants of race, color, religion, sex, and national origin were accepted explanations for inequality, and the moral value of equity resonated as a valid reason for achieving equity.

However, after the Civil Rights era came a period of national economic downturn in the 1970's and 1980's due to the Vietnam War, the OPEC oil embargo, a huge trade deficit, and a deep recession (Conte, Karr, Clack, & Hug, 2001, p. 25-26). Within this backdrop, the moral approach for equity became politically unfeasible and was replaced by the concept of neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is committed to a "strong free market, deregulation, privatization, and

a minimalist state” (Brand, 2015, p.251) and rejects targeting specific groups and redistribution of resources. Instead, it employs the notion of equality with the belief that if everyone gets the same things through the same pathway, equity will follow. The concern is not with how people are differently situated, but rather on the perception of unfairness that some groups are getting more by taking from others.

Why does equity matter within organizations now when it didn’t matter so much before? If we look at the capitalistic argument for equity, we could consider it as a wise investment for business reasons (Thomas & Ely, 2001, p. 83). In fact, neo-liberalism views the underlying value of equity as less of a moral imperative than an economic one, with the argument that addressing inequities would make our nation more economically competitive. Equity may be pushed for transactional and monetary reasons and doesn’t need to be motivated by what’s fair and what’s right. Demographics are changing to a more diverse population, so organizations need to respond to the preferences of changing clientele and the ability to leverage a diverse work force. It seems fitting that our nation built on capitalism would embrace a capitalistic approach to equity.

However, I believe there co-exists the hopeful notion that people still recognize and acknowledge disparities because of moral imperative. There are folks who believe that we, as a nation, are all in this together and want to serve the common good with understanding that “we all do better when we all do better” (Paul Wellstone). One of the prominent voices in equity is John A. Powell, whose use of language helps us to transcend the dichotomies of moral vs. economic imperative or democratic goals vs. free-market capitalism. Powell coined the term “targeted universalism” and developed its framework of “identifying a problem, particularly one suffered by marginalized people, proposing a solution, and then broadening its scope to cover as many people as possible” (Powell, Menedian, & Reece, 2009, p. 16). His understanding of language and meaning-making informs us in creating conditions for equity.

Creating conditions for equity

Building equity into existing organizational structures that systemically work against equity has become the trend for non-profit, for-profit, and governmental organizations, with varying degrees of progress and success. What I've mostly experienced in organizations have been attempts to place diversity, inclusion, and equity within systems that lack them, and thus, also don't have the framework to support and sustain them very well. A common strategy for creating diversity has been to hire people of color and have an organizational training on diversity. Being hired into an organization was assumed to be inclusion, since you now belonged in the organization. And, organizations weren't addressing equity since it didn't exist in their consciousness. The result was high turnover of people of color because the organizational culture had not changed to be supportive of difference.

Having experienced variations of this in different organizations, I wondered what it would be like if an organization was created with equity in mind from the outset. Since getting to equity at existing organizations may take a while or fail, why not focus on starting organizations that have the forethought to build equity into its system in the first place? What would that process look like?

Since the work of equity is to create the conditions that enable equity to happen (Kania & Kramer, 2015, p. 37), a practical starting point would be to define what equity means for the organization. Coming up with a shared definition for those working towards equity is foundational because you can't work towards something that shifts in meaning. Having a shared definition galvanizes people so that they all understand what they are working towards. This shared understanding provides the foundation on which they can build their mission and values and create frameworks for how they want to be and how they want to do. What sits on the foundation must align with what's foundational, otherwise it just won't work.

In coming up with a definition for equity, one may begin with an exploration of what equity is and what it is not. First, equity is not simply diversity, as diversity is merely a

representation of different types of people. Second, equity is also not simply inclusion, as the action or state of someone being included does not necessarily mean that person is experiencing equity. Inclusion, however, “involves an authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging” (Putnam-Walkerly & Russell, 2016, p. 2), so it can be a step towards equity. Finally, equity is often confused with equality, with equality being about everyone having the same of something. However, this approach of everything being fair if everyone gets the same doesn’t take into account mitigating factors such as power, positionality, and race.

Equity, in contrast, does take these factors into account. When looking at equity, one does consider outcomes in the context of power, positionality, race, ethnicity, immigration status, gender identity, different ability, socioeconomic background, and so on. There is an understanding that different things have to be done depending on circumstances to reach the goal of equity. Angela Glover Blackwell, founder and CEO of PolicyLink, captures these nuances in her definition of equity as “the just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential” (Blackwell, 2015, p. 4). My own provisional definition of equity is to be treated normally without having to be so deeply impacted by mitigating factors and, particularly, by race. This does not mean that folks must assimilate into dominant culture. It simply means that folks want to be treated well, as those in dominant culture expect to be without having to think about it.

Understanding what equity means within an organization is a good first step, but the long view is to have an organization that has an explicit equity lens. According to Juan Sebastian Arias from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, “you need to be explicit about equity in order to get results”, and “equity needs to be an explicit lens through which you do your analysis and your strategy design” (Arias & Brady, 2015, p.2). According to Junious Williams, Senior Advisor of the Collective Impact Forum, “An equity lens asks what disparities exist among different groups; takes into account historical and current institutional and structural sources of

inequality; and takes explicit steps to build the social, economic, and political power of the people most affected by inequities in order to narrow gaps while improving overall outcomes” (Williams, 2014, p. 2).

To view an organization through an explicit equity lens, we can start by analyzing an organization as a system. An organization falls under the definition of a system, which is “an organized collection of parts that are highly integrated in order to accomplish an overall goal or outcome” (Google Dictionary). We would want to understand what makes up that system and what could cause that system to become inequitable. We would also want to understand how people interact with the system and consider how the system changes according to those interactions. With this understanding comes the opportunity to intervene and challenge practices that perpetuate inequities before they become entrenched.

Also, the issues of power and privilege within an organization specifically need to be addressed, otherwise equity won’t be sustainable. An organization needs to understand how power and privilege work within its system around class, gender, and other implicit factors, but particularly around race. Thus, we take a closer look at race and racism. Race is defined as “a political construction created to concentrate power with white people and legitimize dominance over non-white people”, and racism is “racial prejudice + power” (Racial Equity Tools Glossary). Furthermore, “[r]acism is not simply the particular racist beliefs or actions of an individual. Racism is a system through which power is distributed unequally and undemocratically by race” (Mura, 2016, p.1).

According to McIntosh, the U.S. holds onto a myth of monoculture that “there is one American culture and that we all experience it more or less the same way” (McIntosh, 2009, p. 3). In our society, whiteness is the dominant identity and Anglo-European is the cultural framework that is considered normal and understood as the culture of power. Folks outside of this norm are expected to assimilate into white culture as it is assumed that there is a great deal to gain from fitting into the “normal” culture. “When white people absorb this notion that their

culture is superior to others, they also fall under the assumption that it is natural for white people to be in charge of the world and its affairs, and that only a very unusual person of color, unlike others of his or her kind, can be trusted with power” (McIntosh, 2009, p. 3). Thus, the myth of monoculture leads to the myth of white moral elevation, also called internalized superiority.

These myths rest on the unearned asset of white privilege. According to McGrady, “Privilege is not an outcome of individual choice or actions. It’s structural. By and large, you’re born into it” (McGrady, 2015, p.1). The system of privilege gives those with privilege more agency. And, by exerting agency, they exert power. Those with power invite others to adopt their beliefs and values to gain agency. “After all, if the privileged believe that others can gain the agency they have through conformity, why bother examining the underlying problems in the system?” (McGrady, 2015, p. 2)

Privilege is systemic and is a factor in everything from economic opportunities to everyday personal interactions. Being educated about privilege is a key step in disrupting the system, but it doesn’t necessarily change the status quo. For instance, a privileged person may acknowledge privilege, but may also have little motivation to alter a system that gives an advantage. Once acknowledged, it becomes a moral and ethical decision for an individual in choosing a path forward -- whether to maintain or to disrupt the status quo.

To maintain the status quo, one can reproduce a system of privilege by actively or passively participating in it. In their podcast about race (Ballantine & Ramey, 2018), Ballantine and Ramey cover three nuanced strategies for maintaining the status quo: containing power, going at “our” pace, and white supremacy in actions of allies. With containing power, white folks agree that everyone can be treated the same as long as power dynamics advantage them. If power dynamics shift so that power equalizes, white folks can complain of unequal treatment. They perceive it as unfair that they have to give up some power so that another group can gain a fairer share. Going at “our” pace means centering the comfort level of white folks in addressing power and privilege at the expense of delaying equity for non-white folks. It is false

action towards a goal that will intentionally never be reached. White supremacy in action of allies is essentially a refusal to give up power. White folks are willing to use their power to ally with non-white folks, but they are unwilling to relinquish power in a way that allows non-white folks to do for themselves. Thus, they use proximity to whiteness to elevate non-whiteness, underscoring that whiteness remains the norm and the preferred status.

In contrast, choosing to disrupt the status quo is to destabilize the system by refusing to perpetuate it. powell, Heller, and Bundalli offer an approach to better situate and use power to create a transformation of power relations. They indicate that “[i]n traditional approaches to building power, we look for existing common interest. This can lead to transactional power, or power based on a time-limited exchange that leaves the underlying structure intact. If, on the other hand, we recognize the different ways that we are situated within a structure and thereby reveal the multiple ways the problem is created and re-created, we can respond with interventions that transform the structure itself. This builds transformative power” (powell, Heller, & Bundalli, 2011, p. 38).

powell, Heller, & Bundalli also indicate that “[o]vercoming structural tensions between groups requires leadership, constructive dialogue, trust and new frames” (powell, Heller, & Bundalli, 2011, p. 38). Dialoguing about race, racism, power, and privilege is difficult, but it is necessary for achieving equity. It’s challenging, if not impossible, to build trust if you can’t talk to each other, even if it’s uncomfortable. And, if you can’t talk to each other about difficult issues, you can’t deal with them. “Constructive dialogue is inclusive of all groups and enlists our different and evolving stories and knowledge in the process of making change” (powell, Heller, & Bundalli, 2011, p. 38). It is a means of building trust and generating new frames for solving embedded problems.

Having provided an overview of some conditions that enable equity to happen within an organization, I now consider the challenge of resilience. A crucial aspect of building an equitable organization is resilience, which is “the ability to learn how to do better through

adversity. Resilience involves the ability to reassemble resources and activities in ways that enable systems to continue to work despite disruptions” (Quick & Feldman, 2014, p. 674). Once an equitable organization is created, how can it be supported for resilience and scalability?

Social enterprise is a relatively new business model which has garnered positive feedback for combining profit and social impact. This paper looks at the interplay of equity and social enterprise, considering why organizations choose this business model -- whether as a response to equity or as a promising model for resilience, or both.

Social enterprise for addressing equity and resilience

The organization model I have experienced that explicitly does work for social benefit has been the non-profit. I have found that this model has shortcomings for addressing equity and resilience that cannot be changed because those elements are what defines it as a non-profit. For instance, a non-profit’s major source of funding comes from grants and donations. However, there is strong evidence that grantmaking and philanthropy is inequitable, particularly for women’s groups, organizations led by racial minorities, and Native Americans (powell, 2015). And, if a non-profit wants to raise earned revenue to buttress against shortfalls in grants or donations, it risks losing its tax-exempt status if it earns too much revenue. These examples of the limitations of a non-profit model compelled me to consider whether a different type of organizational model might make a difference. Might the social enterprise model be a promising alternative for equity and resilience?

The social enterprise model is a combination of private sector and social sector approaches. Like a for-profit, a social enterprise can make a profit and distribute it to investors. And, like a non-profit, a social enterprise legally and explicitly commits to a social purpose (Ochs & Brown, 2013, p. 12). Social enterprise organizations can be non-profits or for-profits as long as they “have committed to integrate social impact as a legal component of their business

model by declaring Public Benefit Corporation status or adding earned revenue as a nonprofit” (“What is a social enterprise?” n.d.).

Social enterprise designation in Minnesota became legal on January 1, 2015, five years after the first legislation was passed in Maryland in 2010 (Schmitt, 2016, p. 6). This legislation is titled the Minnesota Public Benefit Corporation Act, and the legal term for a social enterprise is a public benefit corporation (PBC). The terms “social enterprise” and “public benefit corporation” are used interchangeably in this paper.

When choosing to become a certain type of business entity, an organization is essentially choosing why it exists and what it is attempting to accomplish. For instance, a for-profit organization focuses on maximizing profits for its investors, and its mission and values will reflect this focus. How it goes about securing and using resources, developing business practices, and presenting its image and story to the world will be different than a non-profit, which focuses on creating a positive social impact rather than enriching shareholders. By designating itself as a social enterprise, an organization is making an explicit statement that it is not only about profit, but also about social impact.

There are various reasons why an organization chooses to become a social enterprise. For a non-profit, earned income from social enterprise may be the opportunity for financial viability and growth, as well as a strategy to overcome systemic resource constraints. For instance, if charitable giving or government funding decrease, earned revenue from a profit-making venture can fill in the financial gap as long as the amount falls within legal guidelines. Or, if restricted funds constrain how money can be spent, unrestricted funds from social enterprise can be the solution to spending flexibility. Thus, for non-profits, “social enterprise can be a powerful complement [alongside] other activities when it advances the social mission and the financial independence of the organization” (Why identify as a social enterprise?”, n.d.). An added benefit for a non-profit start-up is the opportunity to embed social impact and financial stability from the outset.

For a for-profit, social enterprise designation “enable[s] a company to integrate social impact into business operations and integrate social goals alongside financial returns” (Why identify as a social enterprise?”, n.d.). A for-profit business doesn’t need to designate as a social enterprise to include social impact in its business model, but it may be motivated to do so as an explicit statement of the organization’s purpose and values. It is possible that a business may choose social enterprise designation as a marketing ploy. In my opinion, a social entrepreneur is more committed to social impact than to marketing because there are easier and less costly ways to get a return on marketing than designating as a social enterprise. For one thing, the environment for starting a social enterprise is daunting. Social enterprises are still new to the business world, so it’s tough to find startup funding. They haven’t been in existence long enough to establish a track record of success, so investors consider them as more risky investments than traditional for-profits. For another, running a business with a double bottom line of social impact and profit is more complex than running one with a single bottom line.

If creating a social enterprise is so daunting, why do it? The motivation comes back to the desire for making a positive social impact and having the ability to sustain it. “Society needs ways to scale effective social improvements, and historically, no system has been more powerful at scaling ideas than capitalism” (Ochs & Brown, 2013, p. 13). As a social enterprise scales, so does the social impact. By leveraging capitalism in this way, social enterprise becomes a new form of capitalism that is hopeful, pragmatic, and generative.

In researching my paper topic, I wondered whether social entrepreneurs were motivated by equity issues in choosing the social enterprise model. I thought that by doing work for social benefit, one can’t help but be exposed to issues of equity. However, I didn’t come across research on social enterprise that explicitly spoke to the issue of equity as the motivation for choosing that business designation. Thus, I extrapolated from my readings on how funding works in the non-profit world to highlight how funding can affect equity for an organization. This

framing of equity within funding helped me to understand how choosing social enterprise over the non-profit model can make sense for reasons of equity.

The funding model for a non-profit involves fundraising and procuring money through grants and foundations. According to powell, there is implicit bias reflected in grantmaking and philanthropy. Those who tend to be underfunded are women's groups, organizations led by racial minorities, and Native Americans, with "less than 5 percent of the charitable donations from more than 72,000 U.S. foundations [are] granted to communities of color" (powell, 2015, p. 13). Money through grants and foundations often come with use restrictions, and powell found that "[s]maller and midsized nonprofits—those more likely to serve the poor—continuously lack access to reliable funding sources to help them cover their full operating costs. For smaller non-profits, the restrictions that come with grant money spending is often prohibitive" (powell, 2015, p. 13). Another thing to consider is that grants come with criteria, so when you apply for a grant, you might have to decide whether to change your idea or approach to fit the criteria or forego getting the grant. These are the dynamics in grantmaking and philanthropy that produce and exacerbate inequity. Knowing this, one might decide to choose social enterprise to bypass the inequities of non-profit funding.

Having looked at equity and social enterprise through research materials, I wanted to see how it works in the real world. I interviewed the leaders of three Twin Cities organizations who have social enterprises -- Eat for Equity Catering, Element Gym, and Appetite for Change. At Eat for Equity, I spoke with Emily Torgrimson (founder), Jametta Raspberry (chef and kitchen manager), and Mecca Bos (communications and marketing manager). At Element Gym, I spoke with Dalton Outlaw (founder). At Appetite for Change, I spoke with Jennifer Tacheny (board member) and LaTasha Powell (co-founder).

I chose organizations at different stages – newly formed, ready to scale, and established by having scaled – to discover if there might be cause and effect relationships between equity and social enterprise within those stages. Other questions of interest include: Does equity

have any influence on the choice of the business model? Is the choice of the social enterprise model a response to issues of equity? And, what effects, if any, did scaling have on equity within the social enterprise model?

Introducing three Twin Cities organizations

Eat for Equity

Emily Torgrimson founded Eat for Equity in 2005 when she was a student in Boston living in cooperative housing. According to Emily, it was a community that in many ways was built around food because they shared meals most days of the week and the kitchen was the center of the house. During her senior year, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and she wanted to do something. Since she was on financial aid and didn't have much money, she started thinking about what she potentially could do. She found a recipe for jambalaya and asked her housemates if they would be willing to give a buck or two for hurricane relief if she made jambalaya for dinner. Her housemates invited their friends, and housemates' friends invited their friends, and Emily served jambalaya to a hundred people. This became Eat for Equity's first fundraising dinner. Emily realized that this model would work for any cause. When she moved back to Minneapolis in 2007, she started hosting events in her home. A year later, Eat for Equity grew their community by having rotating dinners hosted at different homes. Several years later, Eat for Equity has grown capacity far beyond the walls of a house, hosting dinners in large spaces, such as galleries, breweries, event halls, and public parks.

Eat for Equity Catering is a new social enterprise that sprung out of the non-profit Eat for Equity. In 2013, Eat for Equity created the catering service to build earned revenue to expand and support the organization's work. Their catering revenue grew to the extent that it could potentially affect their tax-exempt status. Thus, in 2018, they separated their catering into a specific benefit corporation (a subcategory of public benefit corporation) owned wholly by the

non-profit. For this new venture, Emily brought in Jametta Raspberry, chef and kitchen manager, and Mecca Bos, communications and marketing manager.

Element Gym

Dalton Outlaw founded Element Boxing (later renamed Element Gym) in 2011, two years after graduating with a business administration degree from Concordia University. After graduating from college, he knew he wanted to someday open his own business. He just didn't know that it would happen so soon after college. The main reason he opened a boxing gym was because the neighborhood gym he was participating in was closing, which made him wonder where he was going to box. He also wondered where all the kids in his gym were going to box.

Dalton grew up in St. Paul's Frogtown neighborhood and started boxing at age 8 at a neighborhood boxing gym within walking distance from his home. According to Dalton, "Boxing quickly became my outlet as I grew up in an economically challenged community that didn't offer much guidance or many positive male role models" (Christensen, 2015, p.1). Boxing kept him busy and out of trouble and eventually led him to other sports, resulting in a football scholarship to Concordia University. Thus, Dalton understood the larger impact of losing a boxing gym on the youth in his community.

At the time when his neighborhood gym closed, many Twin Cities boxing gyms were closing their doors. Dalton's solution was to sell his car to finance his own gym. He realized that he had to offer more than boxing, so his gym focused on exercise and health as well. Dalton started in a 1,200 square foot basement and expanded two years later into his present-day location with 8,500 square feet of open space.

Element Gym converted from a limited liability corporation (LLC) to a specific benefit corporation (a subcategory of public benefit corporation) in 2016. This business legal status wasn't an option when Dalton first opened his gym, but he switched when it became one

because he believed that social impact was what his business has always been about. He says, “I considered myself a benefit corporation before the entity was structured.” He wants to use the designation to help people understand his values and, by extension, the values of his organization.

In 2016, Dalton also created the Element Foundation as a non-profit subsidiary of Element Gym to bring in funding resources that are unavailable to social enterprise, such as donations and grants. The foundation offers free and reduced programs and scholarships to qualifying youth and works with the St. Paul Police Department and Ramsey County to offer programs to at-risk youth.

Element Gym continues to be creative in its business model as it enters into its next phase of scaling by forming a non-profit wellness collective called Co-Motion Center for Movement consisting of a boxing gym (Element Gym), dance studio (St. Paul Ballet), dojo, and fitness and event center stretching 39,000 square feet.

Appetite for Change

Michele Horowitz, co-founder of Appetite for Change, is an experienced lawyer and an experienced chef who has a passion for food and racial and economic justice. She also has an affinity for North Minneapolis where her grandparents, father, and their family had lived for over 40 years. In 2010, Michele was brainstorming around a concept called Urban Baby, with the idea of teaching mothers in North Minneapolis to create healthy baby food from locally sourced ingredients. In doing this programming, Michele heard from the community that her vision was too small. What the community wanted was to build the whole health of the community, not just the babies. In 2011, Michele connected with community leaders, LaTasha Powell and Princess Titus, and worked with the community to establish the non-profit, Appetite for Change.

Appetite for Change’s mission is “to use food as a tool for building health, wealth, and social change in North Minneapolis” (<https://appetiteforchangemn.org/>). In 2013, Michele

wanted “to generate more revenue from new ventures, products, and services, and rely less on grants and donations” (Nelson, 2013, p. 1). According to her, they were constantly innovating and “trying to move toward a more for-profit business model because it’s just so much more sustainable” (Nelson, 2013, p. 1). She had an idea to start a café that would sell fresh and nutritious food and offer jobs and training to people in her community. On April 29, 2015, Breaking Bread Café & Catering opened its doors as a community driven eatery in North Minneapolis. With new legislation allowing for designation as a public benefit corporation, Breaking Bread Café & Catering became a specific benefit corporation (a subcategory of public benefit corporation) owned by Appetite for Change. Appetite for Change also owns a second specific benefit corporation, Kindred Kitchen, a shared commissary kitchen offering affordable shared space for small food businesses to launch or grow their business. Currently, Appetite for Change has completed scaling and is well established. Moving forward, they have chosen to stop scaling and, instead, go deeper into the work they are doing.

Items of Note:

- Each of these organizations traveled different roads to social enterprise, but each share the same motivation of leveraging financial resilience.
- Each of these organizations push the envelope by creatively using more than one organizational form within its organization.

How equity shows up in each organization

Eat for Equity

An organization with “equity” in its name, unsurprisingly, includes equity in its mission: “Eat for Equity builds a culture of generosity through sustainable community feasts. We envision an equitable world, co-created by communities engaged in whole-person giving” (<https://eatforequity.org/about/>). Their values also include equity, which they actively support by

investing in locally-based social justice organizations that address inequities in a range of issues. For example, they held a Welcome Feast fundraiser and donated all the proceeds to the Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota.

Eat for Equity Catering's mission aligns with its non-profit owner: "Eat for Equity Catering promotes and models equitable and sustainable food sourcing, provides access to conscious food choices, and uses catering to support local nonprofit causes"

(<https://eatforequity.org/about-catering/>). In 2018, their food was 83% organic and local, and 75% of their food dollars were spent at co-ops and women-owned or minority owned businesses. They are building equity in the community by how they spend their dollars.

The organization's narrative of equity doesn't necessarily amplify internal organizational equity so much as external mission equity. Through conversation with Emily, Jametta, and Mecca, I was able to gain an understanding of how equity shows up internally at Eat for Equity, and, by extension, Eat for Equity Catering. Emily felt that the organization grew into an equitable organization organically, naturally pulling in people who were drawn to equity. Thus, it is the people who Emily draws that amplifies equity. For that to happen, Emily's leadership matters a great deal since leadership is crucial for placing and supporting equity within an organization.

The part of the conversation that revealed Emily's leadership style came from Jametta and Mecca. Both are African-American women with extensive experience in commercial kitchens. Jametta and Mecca met when they volunteered for the same Eat for Equity event. Although it seems serendipitous in the way their relationship fell into place, I'm not so sure it's all that unexpected. They wouldn't have volunteered if Eat for Equity didn't have something that drew them to become involved in the first place. And, they had a lot in common, so they hit it off. Although the two hadn't known each other long, they were hired by Emily as a team.

Jametta and Mecca pointedly told me that most commercial kitchens don't have people who look like them in leadership positions, either by gender or skin color. So, hiring them for

leadership positions was to them an act of equity. Mecca also believes that Emily models equity in the way that she leads. She says, “Emily says on a regular basis all three of us here are the bosses.” Emily isn’t the boss who tells them what they should do and how they should do it. That’s not something either Jametta or Mecca have experienced often in their many years in the workplace. They’ll come up with a solution to a problem, and instead of running it past Emily, they implement on the spot.

Eat for Equity is disrupting the traditional power structure in terms of how decisions are made. They engage in participatory leadership and decision making. The decision maker may be the person with the idea, who will also immediately implement the idea without having to get permission through a chain of command based on positionality within the organizational hierarchy. This disrupts the traditional division of labor and valuing of labor based on who did the manual work and who did the intellectual work.

Talking about fairness is also key to how Eat for Equity shows up as an equitable workplace. Jametta and Mecca consider equity as core to almost every conversation they have since they are constantly talking about fairness. For instance, they talk about fairness in scheduling, in wages, and in access to resources that aren’t usually available to those working in food service. Mecca says, “That’s not easy to do at all. It’s very easy to lean into any other direction other than equal.”

Because equity is embedded in the organization and they are modeling it, the three leaders don’t feel that they need to write policies or procedures. Mecca describes it this way, “I view it like an ever-evolving living and breathing thing that we’re kind of nurturing and we don’t have time to write it down. It’s done based on the people that came together and naturally decided for themselves that we wanted to live and explore those values in everything that we do individually. So we might disagree on what color something is or how we’re going to do something. But, at the end of the day, we’re all working towards the same goal. And so those kinds of structures tend to uphold themselves.”

Element Gym

Element Gym's mission is "to use fitness as a resource for good in the community" (<https://www.elementgym.org/mission>), which Element Foundation reinforces with its mission of fitness equity. According to Dalton, he wants to have his business be the model that sets the standard for equity and impact. Due to his business background, he considers his business plan as the way to keep focused around the values and the direction he wants to go. He says, "It really comes back to values and how we place things in early on of how we're able to create equity." By making things align in a way that is true to the mission and the values of the organization, equity can't help but keep going on because it's embedded into the structures and the strategies of the organization. In other words, he builds the organization in such a way that it can't exist if equity doesn't exist.

One way that Dalton impacts equity is through the pricing to access his gym. He offers discounts to customers who cannot afford the full price. Furthermore, he created Element Foundation specifically for fitness equity, which makes it possible for folks to access fitness when the barrier is affordability. The foundation impacts equitable access by offering free and reduced programs and scholarships to qualifying youth.

Another way Dalton impacts equity is his approach to the partnerships with other organizations who run businesses inside his facility. Although there are certain standards they agree on from the outset, such as keeping prices affordable, Dalton doesn't have them answer to him like a boss. Instead, these partnerships are a collective community. As a result, they all benefit from lower overhead, which allows each of them to focus more of their resources on making impact. They also each benefit from cross-pollination of the people each partnering organization attracts. The way that Dalton explains it is that each of the partnering organizations attract different people who then get exposed to each other's organizations. The

community grows larger and more diverse, and cross-pollination keeps going because it's embedded into the structure and the strategy of the organization.

Appetite for Change

The initial conversation I had was with Jennifer Tacheny, a board member of Appetite for Change since its conception. After I spoke with her, she indicated that I should talk to a co-founder because she didn't think her perspective from the board provided me with the full picture of what was happening on the ground. LaTasha Powell was generous in offering her perspective. She also explained to me that her organization is unique by specifically serving one group, the African-American community. Thus, issues of race and equity show up differently than with other organizations that serve diverse groups. For instance, discrimination against blacks continues at all class levels within the U.S., but within the African-American community, race might take a back seat to discrimination based on social class.

My conversation with Jennifer touched mostly on how equity shows up internally within the organization's leadership. From her perspective, equity in the organization is embodied by the leadership. She says, "It's always in front of them because they are constantly navigating what it means and how to work with it because it's in them. It's who they are." Leadership embodies diversity in that Michele Horowitz is white, and LaTasha Powell and Princess Titus are African-American. This dynamic is challenging as they navigate what equity looks like amidst this diversity every day.

According to Jennifer, the contradiction is that their success is because of who they are, but their challenge is also because of who they are. "Positive co-dependence" is a term that Jennifer used to describe their relationship; "there's an understanding of co-dependence in a positive way in that they know they need each other and they all know that they all bring these different strengths that makes Appetite for Change what it is." LaTasha reinforced this perspective of the value each co-founder brings to the organization. Yet, there also exists the

tension and struggle of communicating in productive ways and keeping the relationship healthy. Because leadership understands that sustaining their work depends on maintaining a healthy core, they prioritize a high level of care around their relationship.

LaTasha broadened the conversation of equity by extending the focus beyond leadership. At Appetite for Change, equity shows up through community engagement, which allows for expertise to be valued in a way that's more equitable. Community engagement informs and steers the whole organization because it is those experiences and knowledge from the community exposed through engagement that results in learning what's needed and what's next. And once they do what's next, they circle back to the community, to continue the conversation. Thus, the community drives the process of considering needs and actions. In my opinion, this form of community engagement is power sharing because the community doesn't just inform the decisions; they drive them.

Valuing expertise more equitably also shows up in hiring. Appetite for Change has a priority of hiring from their community, with a goal of 80% of staff representing as black. While their ideal job candidate is someone with skills and experience who is from their community, at times, they cannot find the expertise they need within their community. Their solution is to bring in the expertise from outside the community. What's different about their approach is that they don't keep that outside expertise within a silo. Instead, they give the outside knowledge to someone within the organization so that it becomes part of the organization's expertise. And, rather than allowing it to remain with that internal person, they continue to share and disperse it so that it becomes part of the community's expertise.

How communication is done in the organization is another way that equity shows up in the organization. Human nature is to have difference, so there will inevitably be difference in race, class, culture, and so on. The challenge is to figure out how to intentionally navigate around this so people can be who they are. Talking about difference can get uncomfortable, and the common approach is to not talk about it. Yet, this often allows those with higher

positionality and power to stay comfortable, while those with less bear the brunt of a bad situation. At Appetite for Change, you name it and you talk about it even if it is uncomfortable. The strategy is to normalize uncomfortable conversations, which leads to normalizing equity.

Items of Note:

- Equity is the reason each of these organizations exist.
- Each of the organization's narrative of equity amplifies external mission equity more so than internal organizational equity, but this does not mean that internal equity is being neglected. It means the story is told differently.
- Equity in these organizations is embodied by the leadership.
- Leadership that models and supports equity pulls in people who are drawn to equity. These people, in turn, amplify internal equity.
- Equity can be normalized.

Why choose social enterprise?

Eat for Equity

Eat for Equity chose to create a social enterprise for their catering business for financial practicality. The barrier for her in expanding impact was in finding operational funding, so a strategy would be to leverage the ability to have earned income as a sustainable funding source for operational costs. This, in turn, would allow her to expand impact.

Eat for Equity's catering was doing well enough that the amount of earned revenue could threaten their tax-exempt status. Yet, they could have just as well chosen to turn it into a traditional for-profit business. Possibly, having the option of a business model that speaks to social benefit aligned more closely with their values. Although the primary reason was financial, equity could have been a secondary influence in their choice of creating a social enterprise.

For now, owning Eat for Equity Catering has been a double-edged sword for Eat for Equity. In some ways, Emily feels that it has impacted equity negatively because there are new costs associated with having a separate organization that didn't exist when catering was part of the non-profit. This means less profits can be put into Eat for Equity or contributed to social justice organizations. However, separating catering from the non-profit has allowed for greater equity because Emily saw this change as an opportunity to hire people as employees rather than as independent contractors. For instance, consider the impact on equity from hiring Jametta and Mecca. And, one can hope that, in time, the added expense of a new venture will stop being an issue.

Element Gym

Dalton chose social enterprise because having social impact is the primary reason his business exists. It explicitly brands his organization as working for social benefit by impacting equity. Thus, equity is a major influence for his choice of social enterprise.

Dalton has an unwavering focus on increasing impact as the means for creating equity. For him, it's all about the people he wants to impact and in stretching impact. His approach is to find strategies to expand resources and to extend his reach. Because Dalton's focus is on equitable access to fitness, scaling means that there would be potential for greater access. Dalton understands that he isn't getting bigger for the sake of getting bigger or to bring in more profits. Scaling up with his values intact simply allows for more impact.

It seems backwards that Dalton created his social enterprise before forming a non-profit. Usually, it's the other way around, as in the case of Eat for Equity and Appetite for Change. Dalton is truly flexible and creative in embracing all forms of opportunities for maximizing resources and, thus, increasing impact. In Element Foundation, he forms a non-profit as a for-profit subsidiary to leverage non-profit funding. Having overcome the barrier of funding operating costs, he pivots to leverage as much non-profit funding as possible to expand impact.

While capitalism is a phenomenal financial system for supporting and sustaining scaling, Dalton seems to have found a creative way to also make use of non-profit status to work to his advantage.

Appetite for Change

Appetite for Change chose social enterprise because it made financial sense. It gave them flexibility in terms of how they could use their dollars since it didn't come with the restricted funding criteria that come with grants and other types of funding. Restricted grants could also mean that those funds couldn't be used for operational expenses. Earned revenue from social enterprise are unrestricted and could be used for operational expenses. So you can use those funds to pay for operational costs and leverage grants more specifically for making the impact.

Their financial approach for choosing social enterprise aligns with that of Element Gym and Eat for Equity. Like Eat for Equity, Appetite for Change feels the impact of expenses tied to owning a separate business as funds diverted to sustain the for-profit venture means those funds don't go towards impact. Starting any type of business is usually a marathon, not a sprint. But, the promise of what can be gained by having a successful social enterprise may well be worth the risk.

Items of Note:

- For a non-profit, financial practicality in securing operational funding is a strong motivator for choosing social enterprise.
- For a for-profit, creating social benefit is a strong motivator for choosing social enterprise. It is harder to run an organization with a double bottom line (profit and social impact), so choosing this model requires commitment to social impact.
- Scaling doesn't have to mean getting bigger for the sake of getting bigger or to bring in more profits. Scaling a social enterprise with values intact allows for more social impact.

Conclusions and lessons learned

- 1) Each of the organizations saw equity as foundational and made sure to embed it into their organizations. For Eat for Equity, the catering business grew out of the non-profit, the non-profit culture grew out of Emily, and Emily is essentially Eat for Equity. Similarly, Dalton explicitly stated that his business cannot exist if equity doesn't exist because impacting equity is the reason why he created it. Dalton mirrors Emily in that he is essentially Element Gym as he has embedded his values into his business. The founders of Appetite for Change are similarly invested in equity, embodying equity through who they are, how they show up, and what they do. It would be difficult to imagine these organizations without its founders, but by embedding equity and their values into their organizations, they have ensured that they will persist without them.
- 2) Leadership is crucial in building an equitable organization because whether equity shows up, how equity shows up, and how deeply it is embedded into an organization depends on leadership. "Leadership is a process of social influence, which maximizes the effort of others, towards the achievement of a goal" (Kruse, 2013, p. 3). In each of the three organizations, leadership embodied equity by who they are, what they said, and what they did, which, in turn, influenced others to align with their values and work together in more equitable ways to achieve common goals. While individuals can make impact on their own, leadership brings people together to maximize impact.
- 3) I'm asking questions through the lens of someone who doesn't normally experience equity in organizations. I realized as I was interviewing LaTasha Powell that some of my questions may not be highly relevant to her as she is in an organization which normalizes equity. You don't have to think as much about what's normal.
- 4) When people around us notice that we are violating existing norms, they may take a closer look at and critically evaluate those norms, thereby weakening and disrupting an

inequitable system. If you have enough people disrupting the norm, there is a greater possibility that the norm shifts. And, eventually, there's a real possibility that equity becomes normalized.

- 5) Having equity be a normal thing ripples out. When you have people function within that normal, they influence others outside of that experience. When others see what they had never seen before, it becomes a real option.
- 6) In creating an equitable system, you don't have to wait for the perfect plan or the perfect moment. Instead, creating equity is an iterative process. Try things out, tweak it, and repeat. Practicing equity is ongoing work, both personally and organizationally.
- 7) Adapt a model to ensure equity exists in all facets of the creation and implementation of the plan. Develop a set of expectations to follow to ensure equity is forefront in all decision making for this process. Ensure community voice and community-based organizations play an integral part of the process. (The Food Group)
- 8) I was convinced that social enterprise was more about financial sustainability than about equity until I interviewed the organizational leaders. I hadn't expected the fervency with which Dalton Outlaw embraced social enterprise as the means by which he could tell people what his business stands for, and, by extension, who he is. Social enterprise is a useful tool for resilience and scaling, but it can also be a tool for amplifying values.
- 9) In closing, I didn't realize that in researching and writing this paper, what I was really doing was looking for hope. As I was narrowing my topic, I was asked, "What gives you hope?" Seeing my research come to life by talking to organizational leaders and receiving their generosity to share their knowledge gives me hope.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

THE ORGANIZATION

1. Can you tell me about how you decided to create <Name of organization>?
2. What interactions make it possible for your organization to do its work?
3. What is/are your role(s) in this?
4. How do you go about doing what you do?
5. Why did you choose social enterprise over other types of business legal status?
6. How did you go about creating this component?
7. How has it been for you?
8. How is the organization run?
9. Has being a social enterprise impacted in ways you expected? Not expected?
10. Does the business status influence/impact the mission?

EQUITY

1. Can you tell me how equity shows up at your organization?
2. How are you defining equity for your organization?
3. How have you incorporated equity into your organization?
4. Do you have processes that keep equity in place?
5. Does the business status affect equity/inclusion?

SUSTAINABILITY & SCALING

1. How do you deal with financial sustainability?
2. Can you tell me about your organization's funding model?
3. Does your funding model impact the delivery of your organization's mission? How?
4. Can you tell me about your experience with scaling your business?
5. Does scaling have any effect on equity?
6. Is there anything else you might like to add?

Choosing Social Enterprise for Equity and Resilience

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*Signature below of Paper Supervisor certifies successful completion of oral presentation **and** completion of final written version:*

Kathy Quick, Associate Professor, Paper Supervisor	Date, oral presentation	Date, paper completion
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